

Committee Secretary
Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
Committee
Department of the Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

15th February 05

Dear Sir,

Inquiry into the budgetary and environmental implications of the Government's Energy White Paper

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the governments Energy White Paper.

Ian and I along with our two boys have a property at Welshpool on the Prom Coast in Victoria. I am a potter and Ian is a welder who travels all over the country. Ian's family have been farmers at Welshpool for over 100 years.

We note a number of submissions by people and companies promoting wind power as an alternative energy source. Unfortunately this industry consistently fails to recognise or acknowledge the human, societal and environmental cost of wind power. The small amount of actual power wind turbines produce is not worth the social and environmental damage these facilities impose on rural communities.

MRET has been the catalyst for the wind power industry in this country, without such a subsidising scheme this form of power production on such a scale would be unviable, however as a direct result we are now seeing some disturbing side effects of this industries push to establish their installations. We applaud the Federal Governments decision not to extend MRET, however we would have liked to have seen a wider subsidisation of solar power to ordinary householders and small businesses.

We need to consider very carefully what our coastal and rural landscapes will look like if the expansion of the wind power industry is encouraged. The decisions we make now will affect the heritage we pass on to future generations. We owe it to our children to leave our landscape in a better condition than we inherited it. Allowing the natural landscapes to be covered in thousands of massive wind turbines and associated power pylons would be in our opinion short sighted and an act of vandalism. In Victoria so far this industry has made the most iconic coastal areas like the Prom Coast, the Great Ocean Road and the Three Capes at Portland their first targets for Wind Power Stations. It is therefore obvious this industry has little regard for ecologically sustainable development, our landscape, our heritage, rural communities or our tourism Industry.

This disregard we feel contravenes the following principles of ecologically sustainability [c] and [d] as listed in the Object/outline of the Renewable Energy (Electricity) Act 2000 – sect 3.

MRET appears to have had the effect of causing a gold rush mentality within the wind energy industry, they are staking claims on areas all around the coast with plans to build a chain of wind power stations across this country with the potential to turn our most treasured landscapes into a tip.

We notice that overseas countries such as Germany and Denmark both of which have been at the forefront of wind energy development for many years are now backing away from wind power and cutting back the subsidies as there has been no reduction in Greenhouse Gas Emissions and their power is much more expensive than neighbouring countries.

Australia is in the unique position of being behind many other countries in the uptake of wind power and ironically we can end up in front of overseas countries by avoiding their mistakes. Wind power has not survived in any country without huge government subsidies despite being established for many years.

Many of these European countries don't have access to the level of Solar resource we do here in Australia, surely for a country bathed in sunshine Solar power should be the preferred renewable energy.

The Wind industry is quick to point out Solar's higher capital cost. However the cost comparison between wind and solar does not always take into account that wind is at best 30% efficient.

In the case of Solar HWS if the capital cost that would have been spent anyway on conventional units is taken away this brings the price down considerably. E.g. a householder would have to spend around \$1,000 on a HWS anyway and if a Solar HWS costs \$3,000, 33 % of the capital cost can be subtracted from the cost of solar. There is also the ongoing cost savings both monetary to the householders and by way of reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the conventional power that has not been used.

We feel there is a place for a government scheme that would allow householders to borrow for the upfront cost of a solar unit. This could be repaid out of the savings on power bills over time. Such a scheme would have the effect of accelerating the uptake of this Australian technology, creating real local jobs and driving down quickly the cost of solar technology to a point where everyone could afford it. This would thereby negate the need for ongoing subsidisation, unlike wind power that relies on subsidies for most of the life of the project and is likely to be abandoned leaving thousands of rusting hulks on our coastal and rural landscapes when the subsidies run out.

Solar PV is another area that although it has high up front costs the ongoing cost savings to householders and businesses needs to be taken into account.

We feel the advantages of Solar Power for the community are many

- No noise
- Little visual intrusion
- They don't kill birds and bats
- The money savings go into ordinary householders pockets

- Once installed requires little maintenance
- The solar industry is already an established Australian industry.
- People living in urban areas can contribute to greenhouse gas abatement without expecting rural residents to host the so called solution to the problem on the landscape i.e. dumping windfarms out of sight out of mind.

The wind industry also claims wind power to be the cheapest renewable energy available to Australia. We believe this claim is false. Geodynamics, a geothermal power company, has on their website a table showing geothermal power can be up to 50% cheaper than wind and compares favourably with coal. Geothermal power also has the ability to provide base load power, something wind can never do.

The social cost of a large wind power industry to rural communities also needs to be taken into account. There is the question of equity i.e. why should those living in rural areas have to carry the burden of wind power stations when most of the power usage and therefore greenhouse gas emissions come from city areas.

Encouraging the uptake of solar energy would put some of this burden back on city consumers to take responsibility for their emissions and also to be part of the solution.

The economic and social impacts of wind power stations is starting to become apparent even with just the few that have been built so far:

- Industrialisation of our coastal and rural landscapes.
- Community division – this is something our rural communities can ill afford at a time when they are trying to get back on their feet after many changes and upheavals. Rural communities need everyone to be working together to achieve positive outcomes. At the moment those communities facing the threat of wind power stations are seeing neighbour pitted against neighbour and even family members against family members. In our community there have been arguments on the street and within volunteer groups. We are even finding some people won't go on certain committees if objectors are part of it. This is particularly damaging to a community like ours that has a population of approximately 500 and over 30 volunteer groups and committees.
- Wind Power companies sign property owners to agreements that contain confidentiality clauses. When the neighbours and the rest of the surrounding community find out what is proposed an object these landowners get very angry at the objectors, not the company who signed them.
- Noise – The incessant repetitive noise of the turbines has caused major disruption to the lives of those forced to live within close proximity. At Toora people living as close as 400 metres from the turbines have had to leave their house on occasions to get some sleep, another neighbour can no longer work outside in his garden without developing a headache, this loss of residential amenity is unacceptable. Complaints to the company are not acted upon.
- Property devaluation – another couple living close to the Toora wind power station have been trying to sell their property for over 12 months and despite over 130 enquiries and lookers they have been unable to sell. All interested buyers say they won't purchase because of the close proximity of the wind turbines. Through no fault of their own this couple are unable to sell even at a reduced price to the current market.

- Jobs promised but not delivered – during the planning stages of the Toora wind power station up to 30 jobs were promised by the company to be created. The reality was quite different however as just 2 – 3 local jobs were created during construction. The turbines were built elsewhere and trucked in, labourers came from NSW and even the water was trucked in from the adjoining Shire. The local people had to put up with traffic delays and major damage to their roads.
- Rural communities unfortunate enough to be targeted for wind power stations, which can be visible up to 40 kms away, will be locked out of future financial opportunities which capitalise on the landscape qualities of their areas to attract tourists and future residents. This will be a financial liability on these communities if they have the misfortune of a wind power station being built within close proximity.
- Properties within close proximity to wind power stations have seen a price drop of up 40%. Many people moved to these rural areas to retire and have invested all of their savings into their properties and now face the very real threat of seeing their life savings disappear.
- Residents of these areas who oppose wind power stations, including many farmers whose families have been in the area for over 100 years, are finding they have to fight these companies in a court like setting and are up against the likes of QC's and landscape experts. They have never had to justify before why they love the landscape or way of life in a rural community and don't want it ruined. Now they are expected to put into words what they feel about it, quite often this is an emotional experience that goes to the heart of their very soul. They say the landscape is special, the experts say it is modified and therefore not so special. Not everyone is articulate enough to put their feelings into words to match these experts. Many become frustrated or angry. This is causing a lot of stress that is starting show in families, friendships, the schoolyard and community groups simply because they live in an area with a wind regime that suites the wind energy industries purposes.

This struggle is reminiscent of the movie 'The Castle', talk about life imitating art!

When formulating energy policy we ask the government to place significant weight to the issues of landscape, social impact, environmental concerns and inter-generation equity. These issues are of upmost importance and must be given serious consideration if we are to find an effective and lasting solution to solving our greenhouse gas emissions problems that has full community support.

Yours truly,

Trixy Allott

Ian & Trixy Allott